



QUESTIONS FOR SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

By: Katherine M. Dwyer, Associate Analyst,
Mary Fitzpatrick, Legislative Analyst I

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSIONER (CGS § 17b-3)

The commissioner is responsible for administering social services programs, including those funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant and Medicaid; promoting economic self-sufficiency; facilitating communication among federal, state, municipal, and private entities; and applying for and receiving federal funds.

QUESTIONS FOR NOMINEE

1. The Department of Social Services (DSS) has one of the state's largest budgets (over \$3 billion in FY 14) and is charged with providing a safety net to the state's most vulnerable residents. Given the severity of the state's fiscal crisis, what actions will you take to reduce costs without shredding that net?
2. Call center wait times have, on average, exceeded an hour for several months. You have been quoted as saying that adding staff is not "in and of itself" the solution to the long wait times. What do you consider to be the solution? What do you see as an average wait time goal that can be achieved by the end of the legislative session (June 3rd)?
3. News stories at the end of last year alleged that DSS was not completing reviews of renewal paperwork for Medicaid in a timely manner (annually, as required by federal law). What steps has the department taken to address this issue?
4. For 15 years, Connecticut used managed care systems to serve most of its Medicaid beneficiaries, before switching back to fee-for-service in 2010. Connecticut is currently one of three states that deliver Medicaid services entirely through fee-for-service systems. Is this model better able to meet the needs of DSS clients and, if so, in what ways?

5. In November 2014, the federal government warned DSS that it may suspend more than \$3.7 million dollars in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) funding if it did not correct its backlog of SNAP recertifications. How has the department addressed this issue and what, if any, additional actions are necessary to prevent such a backlog in the future?
6. In January 2013, DSS issued its strategic plan to rebalance long-term supports and services (i.e, reduce the number of people in institutions and increase the number served by home- and community-based services). According to the plan, "as Connecticut aggressively pursues Medicaid rebalancing goals, the need for focused efforts to recruit, train, retain and support paid and unpaid caregivers is essential." What efforts has DSS made in this respect, and what additional steps do you intend to take in your second term?
7. DSS' use of extrapolation (i.e., sampling) to determine the number of payment errors and the amount of overpayments to collect from audited providers has proven to be controversial. Can you please explain the practice, including for what purposes and in what circumstances it is used? Do you foresee any changes to the audit practices in your second term?
8. What do you see as DSS' strengths and weaknesses? What actions would you like to take during your second term to maximize those strengths and reduce the weaknesses?
9. As commissioner, what will be the three highest priorities in your second term? Are those priorities different from those in your first term and, if so, in what way?

KD/MF:tjo